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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000929

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTANI FM TOKAYEV IN ASHGABAT: GOOD NEWS FOR  
BORDERS, NIYAZOV-NAZARBAYEV MEETING DATE STILL NOT SET

REF: ASHGABAT 906

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Jennifer Brush for reasons 1.4 (B) and  
(D).

Summary

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¶1. (C) An August 30-31 visit by Kazakhstani Foreign Minister Tokayev to Ashgabat ended with an exchange of instruments on a five year-old agreement on delimitation and demarcation of the 400 KM land border between Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. The two also agreed to improve transportation links between the two largest cities on either side of the border -- Turkmenbashi (formerly Krasnovodsk or Kizil Su) and Aqtau. Foreign Minister Tokayev was unable to achieve his major goal: setting a date for a Nazarbayev visit to Turkmenistan.

Although Niyazov expressed willingness in principle to meet with his Kazakhstani counterpart, he pushed the encounter off until the two sides could show "concrete results." According to Kazakhstani Ambassador Atanov, Tokayev agreed to talk to the Azerbaijanis to promote "trilateral" talks on Caspian Sea delimitation. End Summary.

Meeting the President: Improved Contacts...

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¶2. (SBU) Kazakh Foreign Minister Tokayev visited Ashgabat August 30-31 in a visit which Kazakhstani Ambassador Atanov had told the Charge would "thaw the ice" between the two countries and prepare for a subsequent visit to Turkmenistan's capital by Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev (reftel). During his visit, Tokayev met for 90 minutes with Niyazov. He also met separately with Foreign Minister Rashit Meredov. Most of Tokayev's time, however, was spent sightseeing; he made the obligatory visit to the national mosque where Niyazov's parents and brothers are "buried," and toured the "Turkmenbashi Textile Complex," the Ice Palace, the National Museum, the Independence Monument and the Gulistan market.

¶3. (C) According to press reports, at the Niyazov meeting Tokayev thanked the president for Turkmenistan's support of Kazakhstan's bid for the OSCE chairmanship in 2009. The two also discussed strengthening bilateral cooperation in the energy sector and Tokayev reminded the president that Kazakhstan could play a key role as a transit country for transporting Turkmenistan's natural gas to China. Kazakhstani Ambassador to Turkmenistan Murat Atanov told

Charge on September 1 that the Niyavoz-Tokayev meeting also yielded agreement on strengthening transportation links between Turkmenbashi and Aqtau to include a new railway and highway, an international passenger bus line and possibly an airlink between the two cities.

But a Presidential Meeting "Only When There Can Be Results"

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14. (C) According to Atanov, while the president did not disagree in principle to a meeting with his "friend," Nazarbayev, he indicated that the two should get together only if there could be "concrete results." Consequently, the two countries are looking at ten draft agreements, most importantly in the fields of energy, trade and commerce, and transportation. Atanov said that Tokayev also agreed to talk to the Azerbaijani about "trilateral talks" on delimiting the Caspian Sea, in particular at the triangle where all three countries' claims converge. Atanov said that Tokayev stressed the importance of delimitation of the sea bed.

15. (C) Atanov also emphasized that Niyazov had very carefully described the differences in Kazakhstan's development path versus Turkmenistan's and had asked for Kazakhstan's respect for these differences. Atanov said that Tokayev had responded that the Kazakhstanis were satisfied with their decision to rely on market forces, the private sector and to keep Kazakhstan's financial capital in Kazakhstan (according Atanov, Tokayev was comparing this to Turkmenistan's capital drain into foreign construction companies).

Tokayev to Press: "Nothing Negative in Our Relations"

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16. (U) After the meeting, Tokayev reported to the press that he had an "interesting" meeting, in which Niyazov had talked about Turkmenistan's current economic situation and foreign policy, and the prospect of Turkmenistan's future development. Tokayev stated that, although each country had its own model of development, the desire for mutual cooperation and "exploitation of existing potential" united the two countries. Noting that Kazakhstan played an important transit role in energy exports, including of gas exports to China, he called for a top-level meeting in order to use "all potential to develop the mutually advantageous cooperation" between the two countries.

Meeting with Meredov: Land Border Demarcation and Delimitation

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17. (C) Later on August 31, Meredov and Tokayev met at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a ceremonial signing of a protocol for exchange of the ratified instruments for demarcation and delimitation of the 426-kilometer land boundary between Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. The agreement had been negotiated in 2001 and ratified by Kazakhstan in 2003, but the two countries had never exchanged instruments; the new agreement finally entered into force with the August 31 signing. Atanov told Charge that Tokayev also raised with Meredov -- but not with Niyazov -- the signing of a Central Asian Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone treaty being pushed by the Kazakhstani government (septel).

Comment

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18. (C) Tokayev came away empty-handed if his main goal was to set a date for Nazarbayev/Niyazov summit. If true, his most important success was Turkmenistan's agreement to sign a CANWFZ agreement. Possibilities for transportation links between Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, in particular following Niyazov's decision to discontinue Turkmen Air Line flights to

Almaty, would constitute the first reverse in Niyazov's  
ever-tighter vise on the ability of anyone to enter and leave  
Turkmenistan. End Comment.

BRUSH